

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church**

**Fort Road**

**St. John's, Antigua**

**The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 25 (C)**

**October 27, 2019**

**DRAFT**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**“Did we get Jesus’ twist?”**

**The Gospel: Luke 18: 9-14**

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men

went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Dear God, be merciful to us, all sinners in your sight. Amen.

Russian novelist Yeveny Yevtushenko was born in 1933 and died a couple of years ago (18 July 1933 – 1 April 2017) at age 84. He told of his memory of something that took place (in 1941) when he was eight years old. The Germans had invaded Russia and had killed millions of Russians—and would kill millions more. But sometimes the Germans lost a battle, and Yevtushenko, as a child, had a chance to see defeated Germans face to face. He writes: “In 1941, Mama took me back to Moscow. There I saw our enemy for the first time. If my memory

is right, nearly 20,000 German war prisoners were to be marched in a single column through the streets of Moscow.

“The pavements swarmed with onlookers, cordoned off by soldiers and police. The crowd were mostly women. Russian women with hands roughened by hard work, lips untouched by lipstick and thin hunched shoulders which had borne half the burden of the war. Every one of them must have had a father or a husband or brother or a son killed by the Germans.

“They gazed with hatred in the direction from which the column was to appear. At last we saw it.

“The [Russian] generals marched at the head, massive chins stuck out, lips folded disdainfully, their whole demeanor meant to show superiority over their plebian captives....

“The women were clenching their fists. The soldiers and policemen had all they could do to hold them back.

“But all at once something happened to them.

“They saw German soldiers, thin, unshaven, wearing dirty, bloodstained bandages, hobbling on crutches or leaning on the shoulders of their comrades; the soldiers walked with their heads down.

“The street became dead silent—the only sound was the shuffling of boots and the thumping of crutches.

“Then I saw an elderly woman in broken-down boots push herself forward and touch a policeman's shoulder, saying: ‘Let me through.’ There must have been something about her that made him step aside.

“She went up to the column, took from inside her coat something wrapped in a colored handkerchief and unfolded it. It was a crust of black bread. She pushed it awkwardly into the pocket of a German soldier, so exhausted that he was tottering on his feet. And now suddenly from every side women were running towards

the captive soldiers, pushing into their hands bread, cigarettes, whatever they had.

“The soldiers were no longer enemies. They were...People.”

The response of that crowd to the German soldiers mirrors that of God to the Pharisee and the tax collector. The generals at the front of the march offended people with their arrogance. They asked no mercy and received none. The foot soldier captives further back were a different story. They were broken, beaten men, and the crowd could not help but respond to their brokenness.”

That is perhaps how God sees us, broken by the battles we have had with Satan and his crew,

weary, discouraged, not sure of the way forward; but no matter, God is indeed with us and will continue to be with us. We are never alone, no matter what. Jesus promised, “I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.”

The challenge for us is how are we to behave to show Christ to the world? How does the Holy Spirit work with and through each of us to give the world around us the idea that we and they are indeed not alone? How do we represent the Risen Lord to the rest of the world in our own day to day lives?

A few years back I was serving a church that had an ecumenical service once a year,

actually an interfaith service, since one of the regular preachers was the Rabbi from the synagogue down the street from the church.

When we had clergy meetings, the Rabbi would often attend. And once in a while in normal rotation, we clergy would meet at the synagogue community house. It was an interesting experience seeing one of the Jewish young adult classrooms where the children were being taught Hebrew on the various blackboards. (I have never seen Christian children being taught Greek although our New Testament was written entirely in Greek. Although, perhaps in

some Greek Orthodox churches children may indeed be learning Greek.) In any event, in this particular planning session we were assigning various pastors to preach for this ecumenical service. And the topic we had decided on was the Parables of Jesus. Well, the somewhat mischievous Protestant pastors wanted the Rabbi to preach on the sheep and the goats; but the Rabbi averred and said he would chose which New Testament text he would use at a later time; when he did decide, he chose this exact passage which is our gospel parable for today, actually to our somewhat not

inconsiderable surprise. He was actually one of the favorite preachers at this service and often would ‘draw’ the largest congregation. The gist of his sermon was that he did not read the text as our usual New Testament translations print it, but he noted that the Greek word about which person went away justified in which our usual Biblical translations use the phrase, “rather than”, was in fact the simple Greek word “kai” which actually just means “and”. So the way he said and probably correctly so was that Jesus or the gospel writer’s conclusion was that “this man went down to

his home justified and the other [went down to his home justified as well]. Wait, we say, is this Jesus' point, that both men may have been justified in the eyes of God? And as a matter of fact, the text is rather non-committal on the subject, but instead the text simply ends with Jesus' pronouncement: "for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." Thus, the usual judgement we have usually 'read into' the text that the Pharisee did not get justification may indeed not at all be the point Jesus was trying to make. The point

was probably only that our humility is what gains our exaltation with God. When we acknowledge that neither by our tithes and offerings or by our volunteer or paid service at church is not what marks us as Christ's own forever, but as we humble ourselves before God then we find God's justification.

But in a way, is that not what we in our hearts of hearts think? Is not the Holy Spirit telling us that we can in no way buy favor from God by our tithing or volunteer activities or even our praying, but as we humbly offer ourselves, our time and our talent and our money, then we are finding

that God smiles upon us; and even as sinners in God's sight, which we surely all are, even in our sinful state Christ died for each of us so that our sins would not soil us ultimately in the sight of God when we come to God's Great Judgment Seat in heaven. There we all will stand before God, but we are standing behind the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is continuously interceding for us at the throne of his heavenly Father, God Almighty. We need, we want, we require, that the One who actually came to Earth and died on the cross we fashioned for him, that only he can save

us, only he can really understand what being a human being is like, and only he can be our Savior, our Redeemer, who has bought our very souls eternal life by his sacrifice of himself on the cross.

In many churches on Passion/Palm Sunday or Good Friday when the final words of Christ are heard, we will often be asked to stand and say the words of the crowd who convicted and sentenced Christ Jesus to the cross, we too will cry together, “Crucify, crucify him.” Isn’t that always somewhat of a shattering experience to be

the crowd that finally condemned Jesus to crucifixion?

Jesus hopefully may look upon us as “soldiers, ‘...soldiers, thin, wearing dirty, bloodstained bandages, hobbling on crutches or leaning on the shoulders of our comrades; soldiers walking with our heads down.’ And Christ will run up to us with a piece of the everlasting bread in his hands, offering us a taste of glory, a taste that we can only experience briefly in our service as we come forward for a bit of the consecrated wafer and wine during Holy Communion.

We may always feel unworthy to receive the bread and wine, and in most of our churches here in Antigua I have found that many do not come forward for Communion, and that is surely OK, but it something the Anglican Church always offers on a Sunday, the sacred Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

I have the awesome experience of learning how to be a medical doctor here at the American University of Antigua. It is never a certain process, but for me, even the hope of offering myself as healer among the people is a great privilege however it turns

out. And in my particular situation as a 78 year old, no American or Canadian medical school would ever have offered me this opportunity. But this medical school has, and for that I am so grateful. Many, many years ago I got a PhD at Harvard Medical School in Boston, perhaps the best medical school in the world, and I briefly taught medical students there how to do research. And I worked for a few years with medical doctors doing the same things they were doing at a huge pharmaceutical company in the US; I happened to work on two or three drugs which became and are still mainstays

in medical prescribing, a cardiovascular diuretic, and a drug for treating arthritis, and a drug to alleviate Parkinson Disease. But I never had the opportunity to continue that work after a few years because I did not have an actual medical degree. Now near the end of my life I finally have that opportunity. It is indeed a blessing, as already I can help diagnosing patients even with my few months of training. But I have several exam hurdles between me and my ultimate goal. Still I have been immeasurably blessed. (This week I helped save a ‘plastic man’s’ life in our Sym Lab,

where an elaborately programmed maniquin had some sort of fatal condition that we students are supposed to counteract, and with the excellent guidance of our attending MD, we did save our plastic man's life even though he stopped breathing at one point. I would have to admit that that small life-like experience was a bit of a genuine thrill.)

But we students have to humble ourselves to the massive amounts of material a medical doctor has to know or be aware of and learn as much as we can before we face a 'real person' with a real disease or real condition. Precious lives will be entrusted to our care,

and to a person, we all want to give the very best care we know how to give. We are instructed to “cure when we can (with God’s help) and always to try to alleviate suffering.” That is indeed a serious responsibility. So we all try to do our best to learn absolutely everything our professors teach us. And let me tell you, it is a huge amount to learn. I still amaze myself what I have learned since January.

But whatever our profession, mother, dad, uncle, aunt, grandparent, friend, whatever, we all have someone to care for,

and we try to do our very best to carry out that sacred responsibility.

May God smile on each of you, and on each of us, this week as we offer our humble service to others. God will indeed hear our prayers, and we shall be justified in God's holy sight. Amen.

Description: Jesus' proclamation is that we only find favor in God's sight by being humble before God.

Tags: Pharisee, tax, collector, Jesus, Christ, God, savior, Lord, heal, care, humble, Germans, Russian, novelist, Yevtushenko, soldier, bread, wine, women, justify, justified, pray, prayer, medical, condition, illness, diuretic, arthritis, Parkinson Disease, Harvard, AUA, school